

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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R 281624Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4550
INFO AMCONSUL FLORENCE
AMCONSUL GENOA
AMCONSUL MILAN
AMCONSUL NAPLES
AMCONSUL PALERMO
AMCONSUL TRIESTE POUCH
AMCONSUL TURIN POUCH

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E.O. 11652 N/A
TAGS: PINT, IT
SUBJECT: CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS EXPECTED TO ELECT PICCOLI AS
PARTY PRESIDENT

SUMMARY: THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (DC) WILL HOLD AN
IMPORTANT NATIONAL COUNCIL, JULY 28-30, TO REVIEW THE PARTY'S
PERFORMANCE OVER THE EVENTFUL LAST NINE MONTHS AND TO ELECT
A SUCCESSOR TO FORMER PRESIDENT ALDO MORO. BARRING THE
UNFORSEEN, FLAMINIO PICCOLI, THE LEADER OF THE DC'S MODERATE
DOROTEO FACTION AND PRESENTLY PARTY WHIP IN THE CHAMBER
OF DEPUTIES, WILL BE ELECTED. ALTHOUGH THE POSITION IS
LARGELY HONORIFIC, PICCOLI WILL TRY TO EXERCISE A MEDIATING
ROLE BETWEEN THE DC'S LEFT WING WHICH CONTROLS THE SECRETARIAT
AND THE PARTY'S MODERATES AND CONSERVATIVES. FOLLOWING A
PERIOD OF SQUABBLING AND MANEUVERING THAT CHARACTERISTICALLY
PRECEDES DC GATHERINGS, THE COUNCIL ITSELF IS
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EXPECTED TO TAKE PLACE ON A NOTE OF PARTY UNITY. END
SUMMARY.

1. THE DC WILL HOLD ITS FIRST NATIONAL COUNCIL SESSION
(EQUIVALENT TO A CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETING) IN NINE
MONTHS ON JULY 28-30. THE GATHERING WILL ENABLE PARTY
LEADERS TO EVALUATE THE DC'S PERFORMANCE OVER A PARTICULARLY

MOMEMTOUS PERIOD WHICH CONCLUDED WITH THE PCI'S ENTRY INTO THE PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY. IN HIS OPENING SPEECH, DC SECRETARY ZACCAGNINI IS ALSO EXPECTED TO THE TERRORIST KIDNAPPING AND KILLING OF MORO, THE PCI'S SETBACK IN THE MAY ADMINISTRATIVE ELECTIONS, THE JUNE REFERENDA, AND THE RECENT ELECTION OF A SOCIALIST TO THE ITALIAN PRESIDENCY. IT CAN BE ANTICIPATED THAT ZACCAGNINI WILL EMPHASIZE THE NEED TO MAINTAIN THE PRESENT FORM OF BROAD POLITICAL COOPERATION THAT SUPPORTS THE CURRENT ANDREOTTI GOVERNMENT FOR THE FORSEEABLE FUTURE.

2. THE COUNCIL'S MAIN FOCUS, HOWEVER, WILL BE ON THE ELECTION OF A NEW PRESIDENT TO SUCCEED MORO (PROBABLY ON FRIDAY EVENING JULY 28). THE PRESIDENCY HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN HONORIFIC, LIMITED LARGELY TO CONVENING AND PRESIDING OVER NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETINGS. UNDER MORO, HOWEVER, THE PRESIDENCY PLAYED AN IMPORTANT MEDIATING ROLE BETWEEN THE MINORITY LEFT-WING FACTION THAT CONTROLLED THE SECRETARIAT AND THE PARTY'S MODERATE AND CONSERVATIVE ELEMENTS. MORO'S MORAL AUTHORITY AS HIS PARTY'S ACKNOWLEDGED LEADER, COUPLED WITH ZACCAGNINI'S DISINCLINATION TO RUN THE PARTY AUTHORITATIVELY, ALLOWED HIM TO USE THE CEREMONIAL PRESIDENCY TO FORMULATE THE PARTY'S POLITICAL STRATEGY AND SERVE AS ITS PRINCIPAL INTERLOCUTOR WITH THE PCI AND OTHER PARTIES.

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3. WITH MORO'S PASSING FROM THE SCENE, ZACCAGNINI'S CLOSEST ASSOCIATES (GALLIONI, BODRATO, PISANU, ETC.) ORIGINALLY PREFERRED THE ELECTION OF A TRADITIONAL FIGURE-HEAD PRESIDENT. THEY ADVANCED THE CANDIDACY OF GONELLA, AN OLD PARTY WARHORSE NOT IDENTIFIED WITH ANY FACTION BUT FAVORABLE TO ANDREOTTI. MODERATES AND CONSERVATIVES COUNTERED THAT THE FREE-WHEELING LEFT-WING SECRETARIAT GROUP (COMMONLY DESCRIBED IN PRESS AND POLITICAL CIRCLES AS THE SHANGHAI BAND OR THE GROUP OF FOUR) NEEDED TO BE HELD IN CHECK THROUGH ELECTION OF A STRONG ANTI-COMMUNIST SUCH AS EMILIO COLOMBO (A SOLUTION INITIALLY FAVORED BY DONATCATTIN AND FANFANI). THIS COULD HAVE PRODUCED A SITUATION WHEREBY THE DC'S WAGON WOULD HAVE BEEN PULLED IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS.

4. PICCOLI'S CANDIDACY PROVIDES A COMPROMISE SOLUTION. AS THE LEADER OF THE LARGEST PARTY FACTION, THE MODERATE DORETEI, PICCOLI THEORETICALLY COULD PLAY A MEDIATING,

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UNIFYING ROLE BETWEEN THE PARTY'S DIVERSE FACTIONS,
THEREBY STRENGTHENING THE PRESENT ZACCAGNINI-ANDREOTTI
ALLIANCE. SUPPORTERS OF ZACCAGNINI AND ANDREOTTI
HAVE ACCORDINGLY CHAMPIONED PICCOLI'S CANDIDACY AS
A SOLUTION WHICH ENHANCES PARTY UNITY, STRENGTHENING
THE SECTARIAT AND GOVERNMENT. IT REMAINS TO BE
SEEN, HOWEVER, WHAT ROLE PICCOLI MAY PLAY AS PARTY
PRESIDENT. WHILE STAUNCHLY PRO-WESTERN DC POWER POLITICIAN
CAPABLE OF BEING ALL THINGS TO ALL MEN. IT IS DOUBTFUL
THAT HE COULD ACQUIRE THE MORAL PRESTIGE REQUIRED
TO FILL MORO'S SHOES. PICCOLI COULD NONETHELESS BE
EXPECTED TO STRENGTHEN THE COLLEGIAL PATTERN OF LEADER-
SHIP THAT HAS PREVAILED IN THE DC SINCE MORO'S
ASSASSINATION.

5. NOT EVERYONE SUPPORTING PICCOLI FOR THE PRESIDENCY
IS AN ADMIRER OF THE EBULLIENT TRENTO LEADER. SOME
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SUCH AS THE GROUP OF 100 YOUNG REFORM POLITICIANS

SEE PICCOLI'S "PROMOTION" AS A MEANS OF FREEING THE PARTY WHIP POSITION IN THE CHAMBER. IN ADDITION, BOTH DONAT-CATTIN AND THE BASE FACTION (GALLONI, DE MITA OR COSSIGA) ALREADY HAVE THEIR EYES ON THE POLITICALLY INFLUENTIAL POSITION. ELECTION OF A NEW PARLIAMENTARY GROUP HEAD WOULD BE POSTPONED UNTIL THE FALL.

6. WHILE PICCOLI IS SUPPORTED BY A LARGE CONSENSUS, A SOUR NOTE HAS BEEN SOUNDED BY FANFANI WHO HAS ANNOUNCED HE WILL NOT ATTEND THE COUNCIL IN VIEW OF RECENT ATTACKS ON HIM BY ZACCAGNINI AND ANDREOTTI ASSOCIATES. AT A DC MEETING AT SAINT VINCENT LAST WEEK, FANFANI CRITICIZED BOTH ZAC AND ANDREOTTI FOR INADEQUACIES; SENSING FANFANI'S GROWING POLITICAL ISOLATION, BODRATO AND EVANGELISTI RETORTED BY ABRUPTLY DISMISSING FANFANI'S REMARKS WITHOUT ANY OF THE DEFERENCE USUALLY CONCEDED THE VETERAN LEADER. PERSONAL CALLS ON FANFANI BY ZACCAGNINI AND PICCOLI AND AN UNUSUAL APOLOGY PUBLISHED IN POPOLO, THE DC DAILY, HAVE SO FAR FAILED TO CHANGE FANFANI'S MIND. GARDNER

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